United Nations

Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Security Council, in Presidential statement, calls for immediate end to fighting in Afghanistan, citing civilian suffering, disruption of political process, and impact on regional security; welcomes Secretary-General's intention to dispatch special mission to country.

+ Secretary-General back in New York after visit to Europe last week; met with President of Georgia and with Foreign Minister of Afghanistan during Paris stopover.

+ General Assembly President, in Switzerland, launches Olympic Truce for upcoming Games in Norway; appeals for universal observance of Truce, citing war of "unimaginable cruelty" in Balkans.

+ Special Representative Caputo meets with Friends of Secretary-General on Haiti to assess situation in country; seek to develop proposals on sanctions in light of non-compliance with Governors Island Agreement.

+ Secretary-General, in report to Security Council, recommends six-month extension of UNIFIL mandate; says Force contributes to stability in southern Lebanon, despite being prevented from implementing its mandate.

+ WHO Executive Board recommends establishment of United Nations programme to provide global leadership in struggle against HIV/AIDS.

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The Security Council today called for an immediate end to the large-scale fighting in Afghanistan, which it said was creating great suffering among the civilian population and jeopardizing efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need. In a statement read out by its President, Karel Kovanda (Czech Republic), the Council said the conflict was also disrupting efforts to establish a political process which could lead to a broad-based government, was producing a fresh wave of refugees, and detracted from efforts to foster regional security.

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The Council welcomed the Secretary-General's intention to dispatch a United Nations special mission to Afghanistan to solicit the views of a broad spectrum of leaders on how best to promote rapprochement and reconstruction, as requested by General Assembly resolution 48/208. The Council expressed appreciation for the international humanitarian assistance provided to refugees and displaced persons, and encouraged countries to increase their assistance.

The Council also commended the efforts of the Secretary-General, his Personal Representative and the United Nations agencies to alleviate suffering in Afghanistan, saying it attached great importance to their work. It also commended the efforts of the General Assembly, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and a number of concerned states to promote peace through political dialogue among the Afghan parties.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was back at Headquarters today after visiting France, Switzerland and The Netherlands last week. Before returning to New York, the Secretary-General stopped over in Paris on Friday and met with Georgian Head of State Eduard Shevardnadze. The meeting, which lasted 45 minutes, was attended by Georgian Foreign Minister Alexander Chikvaidze.

The Secretary-General and Mr. Shevardnadze exchanged views on the Georgia-Abkhaz conflict, in light of the second round of talks held between the two sides in Geneva last week. They also discussed Georgia's recent request for a meeting of the Security Council to examine the possibility of sending a peace-keeping force to the region. On Saturday, the Secretary-General met with the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan.

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Continuing his European visit in Switzerland, General Assembly President Samuel R. Insanally (Guyana) today launched the Olympic Truce for next month's Olympic Games in Lillehammer, Norway. Observance of the Truce, which calls for a universal halt to hostilities seven days before the start of the Olympic Games and ends on the seventh day after the close of the Games, was called for by the General Assembly last October.

In a ceremony at the headquarters of the International Olympic Committee in Lausanne, Switzerland, the President called for universal observance of the Truce, noting that a war of unimaginable cruelty was raging not far away in the Balkans. He also called for implementation of the Secretary-General's "An Agenda for Peace", which was now the widely accepted blueprint for a system of collective security.

On Friday, Mr. Insanally paid a visit to Pope John Paul II at the Vatican, during which they reviewed matters of common interest, including the International Year of the Family, the International Year of Sport and Olympic Ideal, the Olympic Truce and regional conflicts.

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Special Representative Dante Caputo has met with the Friends of the Secretary-General on Haiti -- Canada, France, the United States and Venezuela -- to assess the situation in the country in light of the agreements reached at their meeting in Paris last month, a United Nations spokesman said today.

Since the target date for compliance by the Haitian military leadership with the Governors Island Agreement has elapsed, and given the violation of the New York pact by some of the illegitimately elected parliamentarians, the Friends have begun working together to identify concrete proposals in relation to sanctions for consideration by the Security Council, according to the spokesman. Mr. Caputo and the Friends of the Secretary-General will meet again on Wednesday to discuss the matter.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has recommended that the Security Council extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for six months to 31 July, because of its contribution to stability and the safety of the population in southern Lebanon. The extension had been requested by the Lebanese Government recently. In a report dated 20 January, the Secretary-General noted that Israel still occupied parts of southern Lebanon and that UNIFIL continued to be prevented from implementing its mandate. Israel had said that it had no territorial claims in Lebanon and that a temporary "security zone" was needed to prevent attacks against it. For its part, the Lebanese Government was engaged in a process of national reconstruction and reconciliation, and regarded the Israeli occupation as the cause of hostilities in the area.

In the last six months, the situation in southern Lebanon remained tense and volatile, according to the Secretary-General. There had been an exceptionally heavy Israeli bombardment in late July, but the shelling had lessened from August onwards. UNIFIL had sought to limit the conflict and to protect civilians, despite being fired on itself many times. The Force also provided a wide range of humanitarian services in the area. He stressed the need for all concerned to respect its international and impartial status.

The Secretary-General called attention to the serious shortfall in funding for UNIFIL, noting that unpaid assessments now exceeded $200 million. He also expressed the hope that progress in the ongoing peace talks would permit a reduction in the Force's strength in six months.

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The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended the establishment of a co-sponsored United Nations programme on human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). At a meeting in Geneva on Friday, the WHO Executive Board said the programme would provide global leadership and advocate greater political commitment in the fight against the disease.

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The programme will also provide policy and technical direction and ensure collaboration among United Nations organizations, Governments and non-governmental organizations. To that end, it will bring together the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Bank and the WHO.

WHO estimates that since the pandemic began, more than 14 million adults and one million children have been infected with HIV. Less than one-fifth of those have yet gone on to develop AIDS, and the cumulative number of cases of the disease is expected to quadruple by the year 2000.

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